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News Release

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Operation Big Deal II yields more results in Duluth

A 36-year-old Minneapolis man pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court for his role in a crack cocaine distribution ring that operated in the Duluth area from January 2008 to February 2009. Antonio Derrick Smith pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine after admitting he conspired with others to sell between 5 and 50 grams of the drug. Smith entered his plea in St. Paul before United States District Court Judge Richard Kyle. He was indicted, along with eight co-defendants, on Feb. 19.

The investigation into this case was dubbed Operation Big Deal II by the officers involved and is part of an ongoing effort by local, state, and federal law enforcement to stop drug trafficking in the Duluth area. Operation Big Deal I resulted in the arrest of two dozen members of a cocaine and crack cocaine distribution ring in and around that city. Those arrested in that earlier case ultimately pleaded guilty to various narcotics charges and were sentenced to federal prison. The leader of that ring, Bernard Vann, was sentenced to 126 months in the fall of 2008.

As for Operation Big Deal II, seven of Smith's co-defendants already have entered their pleas. Michael Clark, 24, and Earl David Bowser, 29, both of Chicago, Ill.; Alten Eugene Hall, 22, Harvey, Ill.; and Raymond Vick Bowser, 25, Duluth, have pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute in excess of 5 grams of crack cocaine. Antione Maurice Easter, 33, and Damien Lavon Spraggins, 23, both of Duluth, along with Andre Terrell Harris, 25, Chicago, have pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute in excess of 50 grams of crack cocaine. The ninth defendant, Arkeith C. Mosby, 20, address unknown, is being held in Illinois in connection with another crime.

Smith faces a potential maximum penalty of 40 years in prison, as do co-defendants Earl Bowser, Raymond Bowser, Clark and Hall. Easter, Harris and Spraggins face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison. Judge Kyle will determine their sentences at a future date.

As stated previously, this case is the result of the on-going investigative work of the Duluth

Police Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Lake Superior Drug and Gang Task Force. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christian S. Wilton.